To Be A Good Ethiopian Woman: Buna and Fortunes

The cultural practices of Ethiopia are embedded within many traditional rituals. One such is the coffee ceremony (buna) which includes a specific routine for preparation and participation. The way a woman engages in this context has much to do with her identity as a good Ethiopian woman.

Method:
Utilizing photo elicitation (Margolis & Rowe, 2004) and focus groups (Tobin & Hsueh, 2007), I conducted a study among Ethiopian women living in Arizona to explore the research question: In what ways does participation in the traditional cultural ritual of the coffee ceremony contribute to the identity of Ethiopian women?

Preliminary data was gathered among 36 participants living in Ethiopia all of whom were asked to capture their daily routine with photographs. Nine focus groups (including a total of 27 women) were formed in Arizona through a snowball recruiting method to explore the typicality of the photographs as well as what they liked or didn’t like in the photos.

Results:
Findings show that the ceremony is an important venue for female identity and socialization of female children. Participants continue to utilize this practice as an important time for socialization, remembering “home”, and problem solving. To be a “good Ethiopian woman” one must care deeply for the other women in her cultural community, participate in the ceremony, host other women in the ceremony, and NOT participate in superstitious practices or other practices that would be viewed as inappropriate by the social group.

Discussion:
This paper focuses on the findings of the superstitious practice of the Zar Spirit and fortune telling within the ritual of the coffee ceremony. These practices were salient features of inappropriate behaviors that would isolate a woman from her community or social group, assuming the entire group did not accept the practice. The practices become cultural tools that may create caste systems or cultural boundaries.

There is a dearth of research on buna (coffee), therefore this research is an important contribution towards the understanding of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants while examining the use of their cultural artifacts in a new home.

References:

To be published, J. (2008). The culture of women’s status and care work between the coffee ceremony and family dynamic, and how these are influenced through cultural practices and their unique contributions to the community. (Unpublished manuscript).


